



Outline of a Law Office Manual

This outline is intended as a tool to help identify sections that may be relevant for your Law Office. Not all sections will be applicable to all offices.

1. Preliminaries

- Introduction to the firm
 - History of the firm
 - Mission/vision/value statement
 - Organization of the firm: list of lawyers and support staff

- Law as a profession and a business
 - Commitment to quality
 - Importance of clients to our success
 - Importance of support staff to our success
 - Membership and ongoing education requirements

- Office Policies
 - Office hours
 - Work hours; breaks
 - Overtime
 - Time and attendance records
 - Absences for illness; sick leave; medical notes
 - Absences for personal reasons
 - Leaves of absence
 - Parental leave
 - Statutory holidays
 - Vacations: entitlement, scheduling
 - Lateness
 - Job descriptions
 - Orientation
 - Training
 - Evaluation
 - Probationary period
 - Promotions and demotions
 - Grievances and dispute resolution
 - Discipline
 - Layoff for economic reasons
 - Termination for cause
 - Parking
 - Keys to premises
 - Smoking
 - Employment of relatives
 - Solicitations and distribution of literature
 - Outside employment and other activities
 - Use of Technology

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- Working Alone
- [Respectful Workplace Policy](#)

2. Emergency procedures

- Security and Safety of Employees and Office
- Emergency contacts
 - Police/Fire/Ambulance
 - Building Security
 - Identification of firm emergency contacts
- Accidents, Medical Emergencies, Work Injuries
 - First Aid training
- Disaster Plan and Recovery
- Data Protection

3. Employee Relations

- Importance of employees to our firm
- What we expect of employees
 - Loyalty; conduct outside working hours (being a good ambassador for our firm)
 - Hard work; productivity; quality; timeliness
 - Support of co-workers
 - Professionalism: confidentiality; ethicality; good judgment; honesty; trustworthiness; tact; courtesy; respect for clients, co-workers and anyone else you deal with on our behalf; personal appearance, grooming and dress
 - Personal problems; phone calls; use of office facilities and resources
 - Performance evaluation
- Delegation to and supervision of support staff; teamwork
 - Who may delegate to whom
 - Who reports to whom
 - Asking for help
 - Offering help
 - Taking responsibility for team leadership
 - Supporting leaders as a team member
 - Prioritizing work; emergencies
 - What to do if you feel you are being taken advantage of
 - Suggestions welcomed
- Salaries, wages, benefits
 - Definitions of full-time, part-time, temporary, casual
 - Overtime
 - Bonuses
 - Profit-sharing

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- Salary reviews
 - Job-related courses
 - Community college and university courses
 - Medical, dental, pension plans
 - Life, LTD insurance
 - Employee assistance plan
 - Discounts on legal services
 - Memberships in job-related organizations
 - Staff social functions: Holiday party; summer picnic
- Payroll
- Pay days
 - Pay slips
 - Deductions: income tax; employment income (EI); Canada Pension Plan (CPP); Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP); benefits; other
 - Advances
- 4. Client relations**
- Importance of clients to our firm
- Support staff dealings with clients
- Level of formality or familiarity
 - Confidentiality
 - Helpfulness
- Receiving clients
- Comfort
 - Reading material
 - Coffee
 - Greeting clients: level of formality or familiarity
 - Housekeeping
 - Announcing clients; escorting clients to lawyers' offices
 - Clients without appointments
 - Non-clients without appointments
 - Troubled members of the public
 - Troublesome members of the public
 - Long waits
 - Client confidentiality: overheard phone messages; indiscreet conversations; exposed documents
- Client satisfaction feedback
- Why it is important
 - Procedures for obtaining
 - Procedures for reviewing
- Non-engagement letters; disengagement letters

5. Confidentiality

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- Importance of confidentiality in a law firm
- Confidentiality policies
 - Client information
 - Firm information
 - Departure from the firm
 - Personnel records
 - Cell phone numbers
 - Overnight confidentiality
 - Phone and e-mail security
 - Security procedures

6. The Telephone

- Importance of the telephone to our business
- Phone answering: Receptionist
 - Office hours
 - Voice mail –who has access to general voice mail
 - Greeting callers: tone of voice; level of formality or familiarity; grammar and diction; asking name; asking business
 - Urgent calls
 - Troubled callers
 - Cell phone numbers
 - Complaints
 - Announcing callers
 - Keeping reception informed of whereabouts
 - Keeping reception informed that holding calls
 - What to say when: lawyer with client; on the phone; holding calls; in a meeting; out of the office; in court; out of town
 - Alternate call-takers
 - Taking messages: time; date; name of caller; get it spelled; return phone number; taking notes
 - Do not lie
- Phone answering: other than receptionist
 - Greeting (give your name)
 - Transferring calls
 - After-hours greeting
 - After-hours messages
- Telephone manners
 - How to announce yourself on behalf of the firm
 - How to leave a message without disclosing confidential information
 - Tone of voice
- Long-distance charges
 - Tracking long distance charges

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7. Communication Systems

- Importance of these systems to our firm

- Mail, Messenger Services, Couriers, Electronic Communications
 - In-coming: receiving; distributing
 - Out-going: who we use; capturing disbursements
 - Court runner
 - Process server
 - Admission of service on court documents

- Incoming mail
 - Who picks it up; who is the alternate
 - Opening; date-stamping; sending copies to clients
 - Cheques
 - Noting dates in diaries and flagging for lawyers' attention
 - Distribution to lawyer
 - New matters received by mail

- Outgoing mail
 - Envelopes to be appropriate size
 - Return address
 - Postage
 - Postal codes
 - Getting mail signed
 - Enclosing cheques
 - Enclosing documents
 - Enclosing documents that need a signature
 - Revisions
 - Copies to file
 - Registered mail

- E-mail
 - If you invite it, check it
 - Use of E-Signatures
 - Use of task and time management tools in e-mail

- Serving documents
 - Process servers we use
 - Instructions to process servers
 - Capturing disbursements

8. Files

- Importance of filing to our firm

- Opening new files
 - Intake form

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- Limitations
 - Conflict of interest check
 - Client Identification and Verification
 - File folder: physical and/or digital
 - File number
 - Accounting information
 - Engagement letter and/or contingency agreement
 - Assigning files to a lawyer; transferring files to a different lawyer
- Files and filing
- Filing: routines and deadlines to ensure filing done; order in which items are to be filed; filed material to be nailed down
 - Retention of draft materials
 - Organizing complex files: subfiles; binders
 - Removal of files from the office
 - Responsibility for condition and location of files
 - File closing; re-opening
 - Retention and long-term storage

9. Conflicts of interest

- Importance of conflicts of interest system to our firm
- Definition of conflict of interest
- Description of conflict system
- Entering client and other information into conflict system
- Conflict checks

10. Deadlines

- Importance of managing deadlines to our firm
- Limitations diary
- Rules re. new files
 - Rules re. existing files
- Appointments and appearances diarization
- Duplicate diary system (lawyer and assistant)
 - Picking up dates from incoming correspondence
 - Having a primary and backup diary system (lawyer and assistant)
- File diarization
- Entering new files in the system
 - Assigning diarization dates
 - Pulling files; bring forward list
 - Rediarization
 - Periodic (monthly?) review of all open files in system
 - Periodic (weekly?) cleaning of lawyer and assistant's desk

11. Financial Management of Firm

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- Timekeeping
 - Trust account/Trust Safety requirements
 - Lawyers' timesheets/staff timesheets
 - Posting time
 - Receipts
 - Disbursements
 - Petty Cash or Advances
 - Reimbursement of expenses
 - Billing Procedures

- Accounting
 - Description of accounting system and where ledgers and records are kept
 - Trust accounting: receiving trust money; depositing; issuing trust cheques; certification of trust cheques; trust ledgers; trust statements for clients; trust reconciliations
 - Disbursements: capturing; posting; billing policy
 - Other charges: amounts; capturing; posting
 - Preparing accounts to clients
 - Collections procedures: aged A/R lists; reminders; cessation of work
 - General accounting: receiving cash; receiving cheques; issuing cheques; posting the general ledger; general account reconciliation
 - GST
 - Petty cash
 - Reimbursement of out-of-pocket and travel expenses
 - Bank address and account numbers

12. Office Supplies

- Stationery, supplies and forms
 - Location
 - When to order and how to purchase
 - Personal appropriation

- Paper sizes and types

- Envelope sizes and types

13. Document production

- Importance of the documents we produce
 - Quality of appearance; content
 - Proofreading
 - Revisions
 - Prior drafts

- Correspondence
 - Letter format
 - Fonts
 - Copies to clients; file; other parties

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- Return envelopes
- Diction; spelling; appearance
- Tone; contractions
- Opinion letter review

- Documents
 - Appearance
 - Format
 - Cover
 - Proof-reading; spelling
 - Using precedents

- Memos
 - Format of legal memos, interoffice memos, memos-to-file
 - Distribution
 - Preservation
 - Memos to file re phone calls; instructions received by telephone

14. Conference & Signing Rooms

- Booking
- Housekeeping
- Confidentiality

15. Equipment

- Computers
 - Logging on and logging off
 - Computers to be left on and computers to be turned off overnight
 - System administration: who assigns and keeps passwords
 - Servicing
 - Training
 - Software allowed
 - Printer supplies and service
 - Organization of computer drives
 - Security of client and firm information
 - Precedent retention
 - Executed document retention
 - Personal use
 - Backup procedures: frequency; where to store; testing restoration

- Photocopying and faxing
 - Procedures
 - Charges to clients
 - Quality of photocopies
 - Key operator
 - Servicing photocopier and fax
 - Ink or toner supplies
 - Personal use

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16. Client files, documents & property

- Storage
- Indexing
- Safeguards
- Returning material to clients
- Diarization for destruction of closed files

17. Conditions of Our Lease

- Access during normal office hours
- After-hours access
- Landlord's rules and regulations

18. Firm Library

- Publications
- Circulars
- Use by firm personnel and non-firm personnel
- Charge policies for clients
- Organization

19. Miscellaneous

- Temporary assistance
- Outside or third-party services (i.e., copying companies, process servers)
- Reporting error and omission claims
- Security of property: client; firm; personal
- Community and charitable activities
- Kitchens
- Use of Generative AI

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